

Town of *Dunstable* Selectboard
Meeting Minutes.
May 31, 2022
Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827

Convened: 5:00 pm

Present: Kieran D. Meehan, chair, Ronald J. Mikol, vice chair, Leah D. Basbanes, member(s); David DeManche, Interim Town Administrator (Remote); James W. Dow, Chief of Police; Rafael Glod, Lacey McCabe, Dunstable GDRSD School Committee Members

Call to Order

Mr. Meehan called the meeting to order noting that the only topics on this agenda pertain to the calling of a Special Town Election and the approval of a question for that Special Elections ballot. Mr. Meehan noted that Mr. DeManche is attending remotely.

Vote to Call & Determine a Date for a Special Town Election

The Board began by recalling that the dates from the Town Clerk were July 12th, July 19th, and July 26th. There was a question regarding the timeline. The Town Clerk prefers July 19th. July 12th is the absolute earliest date. The Board asked the School Committee members about E&D use. Mr. Glod elaborated on E&D is and the schools considerations towards it. The Board noted that if this doesn't pass again, the town really doesn't have the funds. The Board asked if E&D could be used. Ms. McCabe responded that at this point and time the E&D isn't an option to her understanding. The Board was surprised as in the past they've understood that E&D is meant for precisely this kind of situation. The Board reminded that there is a faction in town that is furious at the idea of a re-vote. Further a summer election, when many are on vacation, could pose low turnout which was precisely the problem at the Annual Town Election. Ms. McCabe noted that the GDRSDs preferred date would be July 1st. The Board asked if July 12th would be sufficient. It was unclear. The school district is likely to end up on a 1/12th budget. The Board stressed we must be prepared for both outcomes. The town truly does not have the funds to cover this. Mr. DeManche concurred noting the town has few resources available. The town could tap its stabilization and some excess levy capacity, but there are issues with both. The excess levy capacity was left at the urge of the Town Accountant and touching it could pose problems for the next fiscal year. The stabilization is too low and DOR and our Auditors clock us yearly for having less than half a million in stabilization. Both of those options would require a Special Town Meeting. Mr. Glod interjected to bring discussion back to the schools contingency planning. He noted that the school is grappling with this and how to respond. The Board acknowledged that but felt that this won't ultimately solve the problems in the near term. Mr. Glod conceded that, but asked the Board to consider going forward with a Special Town Election. Ms. McCabe elaborated that it's a road that may have to be traveled. But she expressed the concern that these are not really "want" projects. They're needs. Ones that have been pushed off for multiple years. The longer these are delayed the more costly they will become. The Board acknowledged that problem for the school district, there are real needs. But the town's resources are so constrained. Touching our stabilization could result in bond issues for the town. Mr. DeManche concurred noting that the bond rating companies look at that as well as other resources the town utilizes. The Board posited that if the town takes this action with a STE then the school district must understand that if it fails again it is up to the district to figure out how to resolve this.

A motion was made by Mr. Mikol to call a Special Town Election, to revote the question as approved below, and to call the Special Election for July 19th, 2022. The motion was seconded by Ms. Basbanes and passed unanimously.

Vote to Approve the Following Question for Inclusion for a Special Town Election Ballot

The question being as follows:

1. Shall the town of Dunstable be allowed to assess an additional \$188,974 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of paying for capital expenses in relation to the Groton Dunstable Regional School District as further described in the Schedule of Capital Improvements on file with the Dunstable Town Clerk for the fiscal year beginning July first 2022?

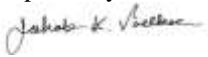
Approved and adopted on 6/21/22

The Board noted that this question is identical to what appeared on the Annual Town Election ballot. The question was drafted by Town Counsel and must be written in this manner and language for statutory purposes. Mr. DeManche reminded that Town Counsel did review the agenda for this meeting as well. Mr. Glod clarified that there will be a STE on July 19th? The Board confirmed that is the date. The Board then conveyed that the town only has so much it can put forward. The town has begged for years that the school district create a budget that can work in the framework of what the town has. For years the district grows at rates far higher than what the law imposes on the town. The town cannot sustain increases above 3 percent when it itself lives on 2.5 percent. This forces the town to spend virtually all of its funds, most new revenue each year, on schools which crowds out other operations. It was recalled that the School Committee has published multiyear plans before and those should probably be revisited and considered. But that will require teamwork and likely a Proposition 2 ½ Override. Regardless, the Board was careful to remind all present that elected officials and bodies like themselves cannot campaign for this. But noted that this is a onetime cost to the voters. It's only for one year and fixes a specific problem. Ms. McCabe acknowledged that position but felt that the school district has tried. They have attempted to make as many sacrifices as they can and this budget for FY23 is more or less level in her opinion. The Board reminded this problem isn't new. This has been going on for years. Proposition 2 ½ has been law for decades.

A motion was made by Mr. Mikol to accept the article as written by Town Counsel and presented to the Board. Ms. Basbanes seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Basbanes at 5:27 pm. The motion was seconded Mr. Mikol and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by



Jakob K. Voelker, Assistant Town Administrator